Appraisal of one major project, namely, Singur has been completed.

Forest area

275. SHRI BIR BHADRA PRATAP SINGH:
SHRI LAXMI NARAIN
SHRI JAGADISH JANI:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the area under forests is decreasing every year; if so, what was the area under forests in the country in 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981 and at present;

(b) what are the main causes thereof and its ill-effects on the life and economy of the people;

(c) what steps have been taken or are proposed to be taken to check widespread destruction of forests in the country; and

(d) what are the substitutes developed for wood used in various fields and other measures being taken to discourage the unnecessary use of wood?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI Z. R ANSARI):(a) Studies carried out by the national Remote Sensing agency through satellite imagery have shown that the average annual rate of depletion of forest cover during the period 1872-75 to 1980-82 was approximately 1.3 million hectares. No separate studies have been carried out at the beginning of each decade.

(b) Acute biotic pressure on forest resources and diversion of forest land for non forest uses have been the main causes of depletion of forest cover. Continuing deforestation has resulted in major ecological and socio-economic crisis in the country.

(c) Steps taken to check destruction of forests and their conservation are given in the statement attached see below.

(d) Some of the wood substitutes used in various fields are given below:—

(i) Use of plastics in furnitrure, mathematical instruments etc.

(ii) Use of fibre glass for constuction of boats.

(iii) Use of aluminium medium density fibre board, PVC etc. for furniture.

(iv) Use of concrete slabs for Railway Sleepers.

(v) Use of steel and aluminium frames for doors and windows.

Statement

Steps taken to check destruction of forests and their conservation

1. The National Forest Policy, 1988 lays more emphasis on conservation of forests.
2. Forest (Conservation) Act was enacted in 1980 to check diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes. The Act has been made more stringent by an amendment of 1988.
3. A Centrally sponsored scheme has been started to help the States to develop infrastructure for enforcement of legal provisions for the protection of forests.
4. Alternative sources of energy are being developed to replace fuelwood in domestic and commercial sectors.
5. Wood is substituted by alternative materials in packaging, railway sleepers, building construction, furniture etc.
6. Import policy for timber has been liberalised.
7. Fiscal incentives are given to industries for wood substitution.
8. Efforts are being made to control shifting cultivation.
9. Guidelines have been issued to State/UT Governments from time to time for protection of forests. Some of these guidelines are as follows:
   (i) To avoid felling of natural forests and where such felling are inevitable for restoration

of crop or other silvicultural considerations, it should be restricted to areas not exceeding 10 hectares in the hills and 25 hectares in the plains.

(ii) To consider banning of fellings in the hills above 1,000 metres, at least for some years.

(iii) To identify critical areas in the hills and mountains which require protection from felling of forests and need immediate vigorous afforestation.

(iv) To set apart 4% of the geographical area as protection area like wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, biosphere reserves etc.

Grant of H.R.A. to Central Government Employees

276. SHRI ANAND PRAKASH GAUTAM:
SHRI BHAGATRAM MANHAR:

Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government employees sharing accommodation with other Government employees are granted House Rent Allowance;

(b) whether it is also a fact that the spouses and wards of the Central Government employees who share accommodation allotted to their husbands and parents are not granted any House Rent Allowance;

(c) if so, what are the reasons therefor and the estimated amount to be incurred annually, if the same is granted to the above category of Government employees;

(d) whether Government propose to grant House Rent Allowance to all the Government employees irrespective of their relationship with the allottees of Government accommodation; and

(e) if so, when orders to this effect are likely to be issued?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EXPENDITURE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI B.K. GADHVI): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) House Rent Allowance is given for compensating the high rents that the employees have to pay for hiring private accommodation. On the other hand, Government accommodation allotted to the Central Government employees is on subsidised rents with large space. House Rent Allowance is admissible only when the employees incur some expenditure on rent or contribute towards rent. In the case of Government accommodation being shared by husband/wife and wards/parents, as one of them is a main allottee, the question of contributing or payment or rent by the other sharer does not arise, in view of their relationship involved. Accordingly, there is no justification to allow House Rent Allowance to sharer of Government accommodation allotted to husband/wife and wards/parents. The total expenditure to be incurred annually by Government, if House Rent Allowance is allowed to above mentioned Government servants, cannot be worked out due to non-availability of data regarding number of Government servants sharing Government accommodation with their parents/spouses/wards and not drawing House Rent Allowance.

(d) No Sir.

(e) Does not arise

Destruction of vegetation, shrubs and trees near government colony in Vasant Vihar, New Delhi

277. SHRI ANAND PRAKASH GAUTAM: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that the vegetation, shrubs and trees near